

AGENDA ITEM IV A 1

PROPOSED LETTER OF INTENT

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA - MONROE

B.A. IN PHYSICS

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Letters of Intent

Prior to the submittal of a proposal for a new academic program, a college/university must submit a Letter of Intent for assessment and approval. Letters of Intent serve two related purposes: 1) they allow the Board of Regents to decide whether campuses should continue to plan for the development of new academic programs; and 2) they serve to coordinate statewide the development of new academic programs. Letters of Intent **do not** serve as the mechanism to determine need, review curricula, assess resources, or approve a budget. These processes are accomplished during the full program proposal review.

Colleges and universities shall transmit Letters of Intent to the Commissioner of Higher Education for all new programs to be proposed, with the exception of proposed undergraduate programs below the baccalaureate level.

Procedures and timelines for Letters of Intent are as follows:

- 1. A Letter of Intent may be filed at any time.**
- 2. A separate document must be prepared for each projected program.**
- 3. Letters of Intent will be scheduled for consideration by the Board of Regents within ninety days (90) after receipt of documentation.**
- 4. A full program proposal may be submitted ninety (90) days after a Letter of Intent has been approved by the Board of Regents.**
- 5. Letters of Intent are valid for three years after approval by the Board of Regents. Upon expiration of this time period, a new Letter of Intent must be submitted.**

The following factors will be considered in assessing Letters of Intent:

- 1. The program must be within the role and scope of the institution.**
- 2. The program must not be needlessly duplicative of those at other institutions of higher education.**
- 3. The program shall be consistent with the mandates of the desegregation Settlement Agreement.**
- 4. The program shall adhere to specific criteria for funding. More specifically, the Board of Regents shall not approve planning for a new academic program unless the prospective program meets certain funding criteria. (See “Staff Analysis” section below)**

Program Description

Per this Letter of Intent, the University of Louisiana-Monroe (ULM) seeks Board of Regents' approval to submit a proposal for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Physics. For many years, the University offered a B.S. in Physics as part of a full compliment of arts and sciences programs typical of any four-year liberal arts college. Unfortunately, in response to continuing low program enrollment/numbers of completers, declining enrollment institution-wide, and resulting loss of tuition revenue, the University felt compelled to request program termination in 2002.

Recently, the University has seen a resurgence in its overall student enrollment, particularly in areas of allied health sciences which has caused reconsideration of the need for a supporting physics undergraduate degree. Rather than a traditional B.S. program design which primarily focuses on preparation for graduate studies in physics and generally requires 42+ hours in the discipline and a healthy dose of supporting physical science/mathematics courses, the University has proposed a B.A. program format. The B.A. format usually requires only 30-36 hours in the discipline with considerably more available elective hours. This curricular flexibility allows students to consider coordinated undergraduate and/or advanced study in other related areas such as engineering, bio-medical studies, and medical physics.

STAFF ANALYSIS

The Board of Regents follows established criteria in evaluating Letters of Intent, as described in the "Background" section of this agenda item. The following four issues are primary considerations:

1. The program must be within the role and scope of the institution.

According to *Role, Scope, and Mission Statements* of the Master Plan for Public Postsecondary Education: 2001, the projected program is consistent with the stated role, scope, and mission of the University.

2. The program must not be needlessly duplicative of those at other institutions of higher education.

The staff notes that an undergraduate program in Physics is routinely considered an essential program offering of any four-year liberal arts college. Hence, if it is at all feasible, the academic profile of ULM would benefit from offering such a program. B.S. programs are most common in Louisiana, with degrees offered by LSU, LSU-S, Grambling, La Tech, McNeese, Northwestern, ULL, SLU, SUBR, and UNO. This would be the only B.A. program in physics statewide. Accordingly, the staff concludes that unnecessary duplication is not a relevant issue.

3. The program shall be consistent with the mandates of the Desegregation Settlement Agreement.

As the 1994 Desegregation Settlement Agreement makes no mention of any degree in Physics within its prescribed list of required new programs, desegregation issues are not a relevant concern.

4. The program shall adhere to specific criteria for funding.

Recalling acceptable financial criteria as stated in the Letter of Intent policy:

The Board of Regents shall not approve planning for a new academic program unless the prospective program meets one or more of criteria 1-5 below:

- 1. The program will be formulated through a reorganization of existing courses, requiring no additional State expenditures for at least five years (for example, new options or concentrations in existing programs).**
- 2. The program will be funded by concomitant reductions in expenditures, requiring no additional State expenditures for at least five years (for example, programs funded by the reallocation of resources from terminated or consolidated programs).**
- 3. The program will be funded entirely through non-State monies for a period of five years.**
- 4. The program will demonstrably promote economic development in the State.**
- 5. The program is deemed indispensable to fulfilling the role, scope, and mission of the university or college and is deemed indispensable to fulfilling critical educational needs of the State.**

The University claims that additional costs will be limited to support for one new faculty member, beginning in Fall, 2010, at approximately \$65K /year. These monies will be provided from existing University revenues.

The University notes in this proposal:

The proposed program meets criteria numbers two, four, and five. First, this program will be funded through reallocating existing resources and will require no additional State expenditure. The University has already hired an additional faculty member because of increased demand from ULM pharmacy students. Second, the program will be critical to the role, scope, and mission of the University, particularly its ability to support the training of professionals in health science fields. Third, and more generally, the program will meet intellectual capital needs of its community partners.

STAFF SUMMARY

The proposed program is well within the role, scope, and mission of the University. Program duplication is not a problem and desegregation issues are not relevant. The innovative B.A. program design should provide some curricular flexibility that was not possible under the previous B.S. format. Hopefully, this change, along with planned 3+2 articulation arrangements with related professional programs, will enhance the program's attractiveness. The University should continue to investigate other ways to ensure long-term student interest and participation. Costs do not appear to be a major concern at this point, but this issue cannot be conclusively resolved without a full proposal review.

Given these circumstances, the staff tenders the following recommendation:

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The staff recommends that the Academic and Student Affairs Committee grant approval for the proposed Letter of Intent for the projected B.A. Program in Physics (CIP Code 40.0801) at the University of Louisiana-Monroe. Any forthcoming proposal as a result of this Letter of Intent shall address long-term student interest and possible funding concerns as expressed in the staff summary.